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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the Wilson Reading System, which teaches students word structure and language through a carefully sequenced, 12-step system that helps them master decoding and spelling. The program targets the needs of students at all levels (K-12), specifically students with language learning disabilities such as dyslexia; students who have been unsuccessful with other reading programs; or those who still have gaps in their coding and/or spelling abilities. The program also works with students who are able to speak and understand, but not read or write English. The system can be used for one-to-one tutoring or in small groups. Materials feature two separate vocabulary levels. The Wilson Reading System has been implemented in 713 school districts nationwide in a number of educational settings, such as public school special education classes, private schools geared toward students with dyslexia, clinics offering reading remediation, and adult literacy programs. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (SR)

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# Wilson Reading System

**Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness**
**Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations**
**Policy Issues and Questions - Resources**

**Topic or Category:** Reading
**Grade Level:** K-12
**Target Population:** Students reading and/or spelling below expected level

## OVERVIEW

### Background and Scope:

The Wilson Reading System teaches students word structure and language through a carefully sequenced, 12-step program that helps them master decoding and spelling. First published in 1988, the Wilson Reading System is a step-by-step method for teachers working with students who experience reading and language difficulties. Barbara Wilson, whose background is in special education and language orders, developed Wilson Reading.

This program targets the needs of a variety of students at all levels, specifically, students with language learning disabilities such as dyslexia; students who have been unsuccessful with other reading programs; or those who still have gaps in their coding and/or spelling abilities. The program also works with students who are able to speak and understand, but not read or write English.

Wilson students learn English-language sounds (the foundation for reading and spelling) and word structure through the 12-step process. This system helps them master decoding and spelling in a structured, integrated process and learn cumulatively and systematically. It has been used successfully with students who have been unable to learn spelling and/or decoding through traditional basal methods, whole-language or phonics programs.

Originally designed for dyslexic adults and students in grades 5-12, the program has been expanded for use with elementary students and limited-English-proficient students. The Wilson Reading System has been implemented in a number of education settings nationwide, such as public school special education classes, private schools geared toward students with dyslexia, clinics offering reading remediation and adult literacy programs. The system serves about 713 school districts.

### Philosophy and Goals:

The mission of the Wilson Reading System is to address deficits created by dyslexia or other language-based learning difficulties, a late introduction to English or limited phonological processing abilities.

### Program Components:

The system can be used for one-to-one tutoring or in small groups. Materials feature two separate vocabulary levels: Level A-suitable for elementary, English-as-a-Second-Language and older students with limited vocabularies; and Level B-appropriate for students beyond elementary grades with more advanced vocabularies.

The program incorporates five elements for teaching at-risk populations by:
Providing direct teaching of alphabetic code

Providing direct instruction in language analysis
Teaching reading and spelling in coordination
Including intensive instruction
Teaching for automaticity.

The Wilson Reading System includes complete sets of materials for both students and teachers in deluxe- and standard-edition models. The components include:
Student materials (readers, workbooks, class group sets)
Expendable instructor materials (manuals, rules notebooks, test forms, sound cards, word cards, other replacement items)
Professional development, including a two-day overview and training videos.

**Evidence of Effectiveness:**

1. *A Study in Massachusetts, Maine and New Jersey:*
A recent report from the Wilson Learning Training Center describes a study involving 220 language learning-disabled students and teacher pairs from Massachusetts, Maine and New Jersey (Clark and Uhry, 1995; Wilson and O'Connor, 1995). The aim of this study was to determine whether special education pull-out programs with teachers trained in the Wilson Reading System yield significant growth in students' reading and spelling skills. Data from pretests and post-tests were analyzed to determine student gains in word attack, reading comprehension, total reading and spelling.

Of the 220 students, 92 were in grades 3 and 4, and 128 were in grades 5-12. These students had a total reading score on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (Forms G and H) or the Woodcock Reading Master Test (WRMT, Forms A and B) at least two years below their grade placement. Students selected for this study had not shown progress in other reading programs using a small-group or one-to-one approach. Thirty-five percent had been retained at least one grade. Students were pretested in September and reevaluated in May or June using the Woodcock tests. Results from the study include the following:
After an average of 62 Wilson reading lessons, the average gain for all students in word attack was 4.6 grade levels, from a pretest average score of 2.85 to a post-test score of 7.44.
In the area of passage comprehension, the average gain was 1.6 grade levels, from a pretest average score of 3.46 to a post-test average of 5.05.
The total average reading gain was 1.9 grade levels, from a pretest average score of 3.38 to a post-test average of 5.24.

2. *1997-98 School-Year Results, Compiled by Wilson Reading*
During the 1997-98 school year, teachers from 55 locations across the country participated in Level 1 Wilson training. These teachers completed WRMT pre- and post-testing with selected students. Students were chosen for participation if they had poor word-attack and spelling skills and obtained a total reading score at least one full grade level below their grade placement.

Some 168 students selected were in grades 2-5. These students made an average grade-level gain of 3.8 in the word-attack subtest and an average grade-level gain of 1.6 in total reading on the WRMT after an average of 64 sessions. The gain in word attack is of particular note because that was the skill area targeted.

The 1998-99 school-year results for the training locations, and a full report will be available in the coming months.

**Professional Development and Support:**

A variety of professional development programs is available. A two-day overview workshop demonstrates the principles of multisensory structured language education, describes general program concepts and provides instruction in the lesson plan format. This workshop can be conducted for an entire school system or district literacy program, or individuals may participate in a training workshop at one of various locations throughout the United States. The overview is also available as a six-tape video

set. The program offers college credits for an additional fee.

The Wilson Reading System also offers two levels of certified training. The courses include student practicum components and are held at 10 locations in the eastern and midwestern United States throughout the year. Participation is on a first-come, first-served basis. Wilson Language Training provides several brochures regarding professional development opportunities.

**Implementation:**

The Wilson Reading System can be used throughout an entire school district or for individual students with special needs. It is designed for adults and students in grades 5-12, but can be used with younger children as well. One-to-one tutoring sessions present an ideal setting. The program also has been used successfully in school settings with small groups or as the spelling curriculum for an entire class.

**Costs:**

Wilson Language Training provides a materials catalogue with the full range of products available for purchase. Instructional starter kits range from $109 to $139 each. The Wilson Reading System sets, including both instructor and student materials, range from $229 to $439 each. Individual books, workbooks, supplies and materials can be ordered separately.

A site-based inservice overview for a school system or literacy program costs $2,000 plus trainer expenses. The training is limited to a maximum of 25 participants. Individuals may register for a scheduled overview coordinated by Wilson Language Training. These overviews are planned throughout the year at various locations. Cost for this workshop is $155 per participant. The inservice overview is also available in a six-tape video set for $179, or individual training tapes ranging in cost from $39 to $59 each.

Level I and Level II certified training courses, including a student practicum component, are available at 10 locations throughout the eastern and midwestern United States. Level I training costs $895 per participant plus travel expenses. Level II training, which requires completion of Level I, ranges from $250 to $375 depending upon inclusion of the student practicum component.

**Considerations:**

The Wilson Reading System can be used in various contexts to meet the needs of a variety of students. Instructor training can be conducted through workshops or viewing of training videos, depending upon the availability of a qualified trainer and a school or district's budget. The program offers flexibility in extent of implementation.

**Contact Information:**
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**Policy Issues and Questions:**
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate reading programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information would be useful?
Should states promote particular reading programs for districts and schools to use?
How can a reading program's track record be checked and validated?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various reading programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh the benefits of a reading program versus its cost and required

resources? Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help all students read successfully?

**Resources:**

Clark, Diana B., and Uhry, Joanna K. (1995). *The Wilson Reading System. Dyslexia: Theory & Practice of Remedial Instruction (2nd Edition).* Baltimore, MD: York Press.

Wilson, Barbara A., and O'Connor, Janet R. (1995). *Effectiveness of the Wilson Reading System Used in Public School Training.* Millbury, MA: Wilson Language Training Center.

Wilson Reading System. [On-line] Available: http://www.WilsonLanguage.com

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